

User Consultation on Vital Events Statistics – Analysis of Responses

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1. Introduction and background

This report provides a summary of responses to National Records of Scotland's user consultation on vital events statistics which was carried out from 3 November to 7 December 2017. National Records of Scotland (NRS) asked for views on the timing of key vital events publications – namely the preliminary annual estimates, the vital events reference tables and deaths by selected causes.

The consultation sought views on two options:

Option 1: Delay publication of the preliminary annual results from mid March to end April and retain publication date of vital events reference tables and deaths from specific causes in early August

Option 2: Bring forward publication of the vital events reference tables and deaths from specific causes to end June and drop the publication of preliminary annual results.

Users were also asked if they preferred to keep the status quo, or a combination of options 1 and 2 – bringing forward publication of the vital events reference tables and deaths from specific causes to end June but retaining a delayed publication of the preliminary annual results at end April.

2. Consultation process

The consultation was launched on 3 November and closed on 7 December 2017. The consultation document was placed on the consultations section of the National Records of Scotland (NRS) website and additionally it was emailed to users who had noted an interest in demographic statistics via the ScotSTAT register. It was also discussed at the Population and Migration Statistics user group in November 2017.

A copy of the user consultation document is available in appendix 1.

In total, 11 responses were submitted by email. The type of respondents can be classified as follows:

Type of respondent	Number
Central Government Department	2
Local Government	1
NHS	6
Other	2
Total	11

3. Summary of results

Status Quo - 0%

Option 1 (Delay preliminary till end April and retain August date for final results) – 9%

Option 2 (Bring forward final results to end June and drop preliminary publication) – 73%

Combination of options 1 and 2 (Delay preliminary till end April and bring forward final results to end June) – 18%

It was generally felt that the value of the preliminary annual publication as it stands was low, and that it should be delayed to allow the inclusion of rates. However, the resultant short gap between the delayed preliminary results and the earlier final results meant that most respondents were happy for the preliminary results to be discontinued.

One respondent preferred to keep the publication of the final annual figures in August to preserve data quality. Others noted concerns about the impact on data quality for certain causes of death but felt that these were outweighed by the benefits of getting data sooner.

4. Next Steps

Based on the views of the majority of users who responded, NRS proposes to stop publishing preliminary annual results. Births, deaths and other vital events statistics for quarter 4 will continue to be published in March according to the current timetable. The publication date of the vital events reference tables and deaths from selected causes will be brought forward to the final week of June. Drug-related deaths, which usually follows a couple of weeks later, will be published in mid-July.

We will monitor the data quality implications of bringing forward the publication, and revisit publication timing in future if it has a detrimental impact on data quality.

Appendix 1

User Consultation on Vital Events Statistics

Vital Events Statistics Branch are considering changing the timing of certain publications relating to births, deaths and marriages, and are looking for users' views on the implications of these changes.

Our current practice is to publish statistics for quarter 4 of the previous calendar year and preliminary annual results for the previous calendar year in early March. We then publish the final annual reference tables and statistics on deaths from specific causes (e.g. alcohol-related, probable suicides etc.) in August, alongside the Registrar General's Annual Review. Drug-related deaths follows a couple of weeks later because of the extra work involved.

One of the problems with our current arrangements is that when we publish the preliminary results in March, the population estimates for the year in question are not yet published. This means we have to calculate crude rates based on the previous year's population figures and are not able to calculate age-standardised rates at the time we publish the preliminary figures.

As the trends in number of deaths and age-standardised death rates are diverging (as discussed in the [2016 RGAR](#)), we feel it is important to publish both statistics together to fully inform users on the emerging mortality trends.

We are therefore considering two alternative options:

1 Delay publication of preliminary annual statistics till end April

The quarter 4 statistics would still be issued in March as usual, but the [preliminary annual publication](#) would be published at the end of April once the population estimates for that year are available. We would also include age-standardised death rates in the preliminary annual publication. These would be less detailed than [those we currently publish in August each year](#) and would not include any breakdowns by cause of death because our cause of death data would not be finalised by then.

The [annual reference tables](#) and associated tables on [deaths from specific causes](#) would still be published in August.

2 Bring forward publication of the vital events reference tables and deaths from specific causes to end June

We are considering separating the reference tables (and deaths from specific causes) from the Registrar General's Annual Review. They have traditionally been

published on the same day, but we are concerned that with the volume of statistics being published on one day, some of the key statistics get overlooked and there could be information overload for users.

Publishing the reference tables before the RGAR allows us to focus more on the range of statistics being published and to highlight these to users in the news release.

However, this would require us to freeze the statistical data for the year around 4 weeks earlier than we do at present, which might mean we would be unable to take account of information about some deaths that we'd receive in that period (e.g. belated response to enquiries about the causes of certain deaths). We believe this would have relatively little effect on most of our figures, and we would chase up outstanding information before the cut-off date.

If publication of the final annual tables was brought forward to the end of June with drug-related deaths following a couple of weeks later, this would throw into question the usefulness of publishing preliminary estimates only two months earlier at the end of April. If users agree, we would like to consider dropping the preliminary annual publication on the basis that the final annual figures are being published earlier.

Questions for Users

Which options do you prefer?

- Status Quo – publish preliminary estimates in early March and final annual tables in August
- Option 1 – publish preliminary estimates at end April and final annual tables in August
- Option 2 – drop preliminary estimates publication and publish final annual tables at end June (mid-July for drug-related deaths)
- Options 1 and 2 together – publish preliminary estimates at end April and final annual tables at end June (mid-July for drug-related deaths)
- Other (please specify)

Please give reasons for your preferences. We are particularly keen to find out whether you need these figures within a specific time frame, e.g. to feed into a report or another statistical publication.

Please respond with your preferences by emailing Julie.ramsay@nrscotland.gov.uk by 7 December 2017.